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England: Sure Start

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England: Sure Start

Abstract

The Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) initiative was launched in 1999, resulting in over 500 SSLPs by 2004, with further expansion thereafter to cover almost all deprived areas in England.

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England: Sure Start

The Sure Start area-based strategy allows efficient service delivery to those living in deprived areas without stigmatising those receiving support

The Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) initiative was launched in 1999, resulting in over 500 SSLPs by 2004, with further expansion thereafter to cover almost all deprived areas in England. Programmes were designed to provide:

- 1 outreach and home visiting
- 2 support for families and parents
- 3 support for good-quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children
- 4 primary and community health care, and advice about child health and development and family health
- 5 support for people with special needs, including help to access specialized services.

SSLPs could add extra services to suit local needs (such as debt counselling and advice about employment and benefits) and specific efforts were made to maximise accessibility for families.

SSLPs were established to serve all children under 4 years and their families in prescribed areas. This area-based strategy allowed the relatively efficient delivery of services to those living in deprived areas without stigmatising those receiving services: disadvantaged areas were targeted, but within the area the service was universal. Community control was to be exercised through a partnership of local stakeholders, bringing together everyone concerned with children in the local community, including health, social services, education, the private and voluntary sectors and parents.

Owing to the local autonomy central to community control of SSLPs, they did not have a prescribed 'protocol' of services to promote adherence to a prescribed model, even though they had a set of core services to deliver that were supposed to be 'evidence based'. Thus, each programme had freedom to improve and create services as they saw fit, with general goals and some specified targets (for example, to reduce incidence of low birthweight, to improve children's language development), but without specification of exactly how services were to be delivered. Such local freedom led to great diversity among programmes (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009).

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- *Sure Start programmes are designed for disadvantaged neighbourhoods.*
- *The nature of the programme is adapted to local needs and hence varies widely in its content.*
- *Because the programme is universal within the focus areas it reduces the risk of stigmatising individuals.*

